

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1013
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY PARIS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 0836

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR MO FR
SUBJECT: FRENCH ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SITUATION IN MOROCCO

1. SUMMARY: FRENCH AMBASSADOR SEES MILITARY ACTIVITY IN SAHARA AS BEING AT LOW LEVEL AND NOT CONSTITUTING SERIOUS THREAT TO MOROCCO. MOROCCAN-MAURITANIAN RELATIONS PROGRESSING POSITIVELY, WITHOUT DANGER OF MOROCCAN ATTEMPT TO ABSORB WEAKER PARTNER. ON INTERNAL POLITICAL FRONT, KING EXPECTED TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH ELECTORAL PROCESS, WHICH, IN FRENCH VIEW, LIKELY TO FURTHER ENHANCE STABILITY. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING HOUR AND A HALF TOUR D'HORIZON FEBRUARY 3, FRENCH AMBASSADOR RAIMOND GAVE FOLLOWING ASSESSMENT OF SAHARA MILITARY SITUATION AND DIPLOMACY, MOROCCAN-MAURITANIAN RELATIONS, AND INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION.

3. SAHARA. FRENCH INFORMATION WAS THAT LEVEL OF MILITARY ACTIVITY IN THE SAHARA CURRENTLY REMAINED LOW. CASUALTIES HAD
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GONE DOWN SINCE NOVEMBER. AT SAME TIME, HOWEVER, MOROCCAN USE OF THEIR OWN GUERRILLAS NOT HAVING AS MUCH IMPACT AS GOM HAD HOPED. RECENT UPSURGE OF POLISARIO CLAIMS OF MILITARY VICTORIES AIMED MAINLY AT KEEPING UP PRESSURE FOR HOLDING OAU SPECIAL SUMMIT ON THE SAHARA, AS THERE MIGHT BE MORE INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IF SITUATION WERE SEEN AS "DANGEROUS". RAIMOND, HOWEVER, DID NOT EXPECT THE SPECIAL SUMMIT TO BE HELD. THERE APPEARED TO

BE SOME MOVEMENT IN FAVOR OF MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA ON THE PART OF SOME OAU MEMBERS, SUCH AS NIGERIA AND CHAD. ALSO, A NUMBER OF OAU MEMBERS HAD DECLINED TO HOST THE SPECIAL SUMMIT. RAIMOND ACKNOWLEDGED THAT ONE, SOMEWHAT REMOTE, POSSIBILITY WAS FOR THE SPECIAL SUMMIT TO BE HELD JUST PRIOR TO THE REGULAR OAU SUMMIT IN LIBREVILLE IN JULY.

4. MOROCCAN/MAURITANIAN RELATIONS. REGARDING PRIMIN OSMAN'S RECENT VISIT TO MAURITANIA TO BOLSTER BILATERAL RELATIONS (RABAT 0538), RAIMOND PREDICTED THAT MOROCCO WOULD NOT TRY TO ABSORB MAURITANIA, AS SOME LOCAL DIPLOMATIC SPECULATION MAINTAINED. THE KING WAS MUCH TOO INTELLIGENT TO ADOPT SUCH A HEAVY-HANDED, COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE POLICY. LAST YEAR, RAIMOND RELATED, THE KING'S ADVISORS HAD URGED HIM TO KEEP MOROCCAN FORCES IN DAKHLA (FORMERLY VILLA CISNEROS), WHICH THEY HAD OCCUPIED INITIALLY. THE KING HAD FIRMLY REJECTED THIS ADVICE, POINTING OUT THAT THE OVERRIDING MOROCCAN INTEREST WAS TO CREATE CONFIDENCE BETWEEN MAURITANIA AND MOROCCO.

5. AS FOR THE ONGOING MOROCCAN MILITARY SWEEP IN THE BIR MOGHREIN AREA OF NORTHERN MAURITANIA, RAIMOND CONCURRED WITH THE JUDGMENT THAT A LARGE MOROCCAN MILITARY PRESENCE THERE WOULD BE ONLY TEMPORARY. MOROCCANS FELT MAURITANIANS WERE MAKING AN INCREASINGLY GOOD SHOWING FOR THEMSELVES MILITARILY, A JUDGMENT SHARED BY FRENCH EMBASSY IN NOUAKCHOTT. I NOTED THAT ROYAL CABINET DIRECTOR BENSOUHA HAD CONFIDED ON JANUARY 29 THAT MOROCCO HAD INSISTED UPON AND RECEIVED WRITTEN MAURITANIAN REQUEST TO SEND TROOPS INTO NORTHERN MAURITANIA IN ORDER TO AVOID ANY FUTURE ACCUSATIONS OF MOROCCAN TERRITORIAL AMBITIONS. CONFIDENTIAL

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6. INTERNAL MOROCCAN SITUATION. RAIMOND BELIEVED THE KING WOULD FOLLOW THROUGH WITH HIS PROMISE OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, AS AN EVOLUTION TOWARD DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS WAS VERY MUCH IN THE KING'S INTEREST. APRIL SEATING OF PARLIAMENT SEEMED A GOOD BET, IN VIEW OF THE KING'S DESIRE TO TRAVEL ABROAD, WHERE HIS IMAGE WOULD BE BOLSTERED BY VISIBLE PROGRESS TOWARD DEMOCRATIZATION. IF THE ELECTIONS WERE NOT COMPLETED, THERE WOULD BE UNREST, EXACERBATED BY CURRENT HIGH INFLATION AND STRAINED ECONOMIC CONDITIONS WHICH COULD BE EXPLOITED BY OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES. RAIMOND WAS ALSO CONFIDENT THAT THE OPPOSITION PARTIES WOULD CONTINUE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, DESPITE UNHAPPINESS OVER IRREGULARITIES THUS FAR. RAIMOND THOUGHT A TACIT ARRANGEMENT EXISTED BETWEEN THE PALACE AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES: IN RETURN FOR THE PARTIES' SUPPORT ON THE SAHARA, THE KING HAD ACQUIESCED IN BRINGING THEM INTO THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE COUNTRY THROUGH ELECTIONS AND PARTICIPATION IN A FUTURE GOVERNMENT. (RAIMOND FORESAW ANY MAJOR CABINET SHIFTS AFTER, NOT BEFORE,

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS.) RAIMOND VIEWED THE NOVEMBER 12 LOCAL ELECTIONS AS HAVING BEEN USEFUL BOTH TO THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND TO THE GOVERNMENT. THE PARTIES HAD DONE WELL IN THE CITIES, BUT HAD FARED POORLY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. THESE ELECTIONS HAD NOT BEEN PERFECT, BUT WERE A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

7. SUMMING UP, RAIMOND CONCLUDED THAT THE KING WAS FACED WITH DIFFICULTIES ON VARIOUS FRONTS, BUT THESE WERE ENTIRELY MANAGEABLE. THREE BASIC, INTERTWINED ELEMENTS WERE AT PLAY:

1) THE MILITARY SITUATION IN THE SAHARA, WHICH REMAINED UNRESOLVED BUT WAS NOT A SERIOUS THREAT TO THE GOVERNMENT;
2) THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION UNDERWAY INTERNALLY; AND 3) THE ECONOMIC SITUATION. THE POLITICAL PROCESS IN PARTICULAR SHOULD PROVIDE GREATER STABILITY. FOR ONE THING, OPPOSITION LEADERS WOULD BE IN GOVERNMENT AND HAVE TO ASSUME THEIR SHARE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ECONOMY, AS WELL AS CONTINUING THEIR FULL SUPPORT FOR THE KING'S SAHARA POLICY.

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8. COMMENT: FRENCH AMBASSADOR IS ONE OF THE MOST KNOWLEDGEABLE AND WELL PLUGGED IN DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS IN RABAT. HIS ASSESSMENT CLOSELY PARALLELS OUR MOST RECENT APPRAISAL SET FORTH IN RABAT 0444.

ANDERSON

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